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In Pursuit of a Justification of Living:  
A Comparative Study of Dostoyevsky and Camus

by

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## I The Human Condition

The works of Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Albert Camus are intensely relevant to our times. Although Dostoyevsky is irrevocably grounded in nineteenth century Russia and Camus in twentieth century Algeria and France, the human condition described by both differs only in specifics. This study attempts to show how both writers start from essentially similar definitions of the human condition and how each proceeds to construct his own different system of belief as a consequence of that definition. The two lines of thought start from essentially the same point, are many times parallel, but are ultimately infinitely apart. We are left with two solutions to the dilemma of modern man: "The world being as it is, how can I live and justify my existence."<sup>1</sup> We can accept neither solution totally; each of us has to resolve the question for ourselves.

First of all, Man analyzes his relationship to the universe, judges it, and consequently judges its creator.

In this area one must consider the problem of evil: If God created the universe and He is both All-Powerful and All-Good, how could He allow the unhappiness and injustice that Man continually suffers? Dostoyevsky's characters are tortured with spiritual anguish: they are inheritors of Russian Orthodox belief who can no longer believe because they cannot accept evil. Not one lucid character is "happy" until he finds peace in the acceptance of the paradox between God and His world. With rage Ivan Karamazov condemns his universe where the torture of innocent children is not only allowed, but also condoned. The logical

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<sup>1</sup>

Albert Camus, The Rebel. An Essay on Man in Revolt (New York, 1956), p. 4.

consequence of such a confrontation with Man's fate of unhappiness and injustice is the sense of futility and ultimate despair. All men, whether righteous or evil, fall heir to the same fate. "Why bother to act. . . there is no meaning to life." All values based on a "divine order of the universe" are meaningless. Thus Dostoyevsky deals with a philosophy of nihilism which had its beginning in his epoque and is voiced by young intellectuals like Ivan Karamazov, Raskolnikov, Stavrogin, and Kirilov. Each calls God to account for the universe He created . . . God does not answer. Dostoyevsky summarizes Man's confrontation with his universe in his Notes from the Underground: "Now I am living out my life in my corner taunting myself with the spiteful and useless<sup>2</sup> consolation that an intelligent man cannot seriously become anything."

Albert Camus views man's incredible inhumanity to man in two world wars between so-called "civilized" nations. Camus does not have Dostoyevsky's problem of what to do with God. . . if there is one He is obviously indifferent. Man cannot even find "roots" in Reason. Like Pascal, Camus defines the human condition as the fate of a "universal death sentence". As against the plague in The Plague, Man's fight against this fate is futile. As for Maria in The Misunderstanding, there is no one to answer his call for help. Cherea in Caligula cries out that he could accept death if only there were a reason for it other than Caligula's whim. Dr. Rieux in The Plague seems to echo the sentiments of Ivan Karamazov. He is "sick and tired of the world he lived in. . . he resolved to have no truck with its injustice and compromises with the

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Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Notes from the Underground and The Grand Inquisitor (New York, 1960), p. 14.



truth."<sup>3</sup> Camus coins a different term for the universe that gave rise to the nihilism of Dostoyevsky's day. Ours is the universe of the "Absurd". "God is denied in the name of injustice but can the idea of justice be understood without the name of God? At this point are we not in the realm of absurdity?"<sup>4</sup> All values are meaningless. The world is "godless and without hope."<sup>5</sup>

After Man vainly searches the universe for meaning, he seeks it within himself. From an analysis of the nature of the universe we move to an analysis of the nature of Man.

Dostoyevsky's characters are passionate beings tortured by the contradictions they see in humanity in general and those they feel within themselves in particular. Ivan Karamazov goes insane because of the contradiction between his rational judgement of the world and what his heart wants to believe. It is just this "tension" that constitutes the nature of man and makes Dostoyevsky's characters "real". Raskolnikov, who can murder in cold blood, can still feel compassion for the young girl in the street. Raskolnikov illustrates man's need to dominate, to have the power to destroy and create, and at the same time he feels powerless against the compulsion to murder. Dmitri Karamazov is dominated by sensuality. Ivan the atheist can not help loving the "little sticky leaves" (representing the life force) as much as his brother Aloysha does, who "embraces" the earth because it is God's creation. As Dostoyevsky has written, "Man likes to create and build roads. . .

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<sup>3</sup> Albert Camus, The Plague (New York, 1948), p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Albert Camus, The Rebel, p. 62.

<sup>5</sup> Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays (New York, 1955), p. 92.

but why does he also have a passionate love for destruction and chaos . . . he is instinctively afraid of attaining his goal and completing the edifice."<sup>6</sup> "The more conscious I was of goodness, and of all that 'sublime and beautiful', the more deeply I sank into my mire and the more capable of sinking into it completely."<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the drive to create and destroy, all men feel the need to "bow down" to "something". This need is such an integral part of human nature that man can find no peace until he finds something to worship, something to commit himself to. In general, Dostoyevsky's characters ultimately "bow down" to Diving Will (or go mad). However, Kirilov, who proclaims the "Divinity of Man," is the exception who is a precursor to Camus' answer to Man's need to worship. According to Camus, Man must pledge himself to fight for that which is good in men and in that commitment finds his purpose for living.

Dostoyevsky also describes the most pathetic aspect of human nature, indifference. Ivan Karamazov and Raskolnikov say: "Let them devour one another."<sup>8</sup> Stavrogin has lost the capacity to feel anything. This indifference comes as a logical consequence to an analysis of the world and Man's role in it.

Dostoyevsky insists that there is another element in human nature, that of the sense of brotherhood among men. This feeling may stem from a belief in the Fatherhood of God, such as illustrated by Aloysha, or

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<sup>6</sup> Dostoyevsky, Notes from the Underground, p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> Dostoyevsky, Notes from the Underground, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment (New York, ), p. 48.

the belief in the sharing of a common fate, such as illustrated by Ivan. Dostoyevsky is careful to limit this concept of "brotherhood". In his Notes from the Underground, he violently attacks "communistic" theories of society (symbolized in the images of the "Anthill" and the "Crystal Palace") based on the concept of universal brotherhood. Brotherhood yes, but one must never sacrifice his individuality to the common welfare.

On the other hand, the characters of Camus seldom reach the intensity of inner tension demonstrated by many of Dostoyevsky's, but better illustrate perhaps the most dangerous trait of human nature, indifference. In The Stranger, Mersault is the prime example of this indifference. Stavrogin is at least unhappy with his inability to believe, but Mersault is actually happy in the sterile "fog" which was his life. In prison as he awaits his execution, he opens himself to the "benign indifference of the Universe"<sup>9</sup> and realizes that he has been happy.

In The Fall, Jean-Baptiste Clamence seems much more "in touch", much more human than did Mersault. He cites another element in human nature: "The idea that comes most naturally to Man is that of his own innocence. . . Each of us insists on being innocent at all costs, even if he has to accuse the whole human race and heaven itself."<sup>10</sup> In the course of the novel, Clamence evolves from one who said, "Fundamentally, nothing mattered. . . Everything slid off, yes, just rolled off me."<sup>11</sup> into someone who could feel guilt or innocence.

<sup>9</sup> Albert Camus, The Stranger (New York, 1946), p. 154.

<sup>10</sup> Albert Camus, The Fall (New York, 1957), p. 81.

<sup>11</sup> Camus, The Fall, p. 49.



Sensuality is also a part of Camus' description of human nature but it is never discussed in terms of internal "tension" and conflict as it is in Dostoyevsky's works. Sex is more of a biological habit which, like that of cigarette smoking, can be broken when not available.

Clamence illustrates man's drive to have power over other men when he states: "On my own admission I could live happily only on the condition that all individuals on earth were turned toward me, devoid of independent life."<sup>12</sup> This drive is made manifest not only in overt acts of force, but more subtly in the name of charity toward one's "neighbor".

Camus' presentation of human nature is very pessimistic until The Plague. Dr. Rieux insists that "there are more things to admire in man than to despise."<sup>13</sup> Man feels a "oneness" with other men. . . not because of a belief in the Fatherhood of God, but rather a belief in the "fraternity" of a shared fate. It takes audacity to "shake one's fist in the face of God" as both Dostoyevsky and Camus do when they search the universe and Man himself for meaning. It takes more audacity and idealism than Dostoyevsky ever had to say with Camus: "Man can master in himself<sup>14</sup> that that should be mastered."

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Camus, The Fall, p. 68.

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Camus, The Plague, p. 278.

14

Camus, The Rebel, p. 303.

## II Man's Inheritance

That men are masses of unresolved contradictions is in itself a common bond. With consciousness Man inherits his drive for freedom, a sense of guilt and/or responsibility, suffering, and the inevitable fate of physical death. The following paragraphs attempt to show how each of these aspects of Man's inheritance is treated by Dostoyevsky and Camus.

In illustrating the drive for freedom, Dostoyevsky has incorporated the complete "spectrum" of freedom from total freedom to total submission. Ivan Karamazov states the formula for total freedom as a result of the invalidity of all traditional values: "Everything is permitted." However, Ivan goes insane because he cannot reconcile this "intellectual" proclamation of total freedom with his feeling of guilt for having allowed the death of his father. His prose poem "The Grand Inquisitor" demonstrates this inner conflict. According to the Grand Inquisitor, men could not bear the terrible burden of the freedom that Christ wanted to give them and therefore they rejected the anguish of freedom for the happiness found in the unquestioning acceptance of a belief system based on "miracle, mystery, and authority" as formulated by the Church.

Raskolnikov's theory of freedom is that the privilege of total freedom is limited to an "elite" who are not bound by the tangible limits of law, or the intangible limits of guilt. Napoleon was for Raskolnikov a member of this "elite". Raskolnikov murders to prove to himself that he too is above law and guilt. It must be noted that at first Raskolnikov's "guilt" comes from the realization that he is not

one of the "elite" (that in spite of himself he is obsessed by his crime), not from an acknowledgement that the murder is a transgression of God's law.

Kirilov demonstrates his definition of total freedom by killing himself. "There will be full freedom when it will be just the same to live or not to live. That's the goal for all. . . Everyone who wants the supreme freedom must dare to kill himself and he is a god."<sup>15</sup> Kirilov was a lover of life and did not kill himself out of a sense of despair or lack of strength to continue the struggle of living. Suicide demonstrates a refusal to have one's days numbered by fate. . . but what good is this "freedom" when one is dead? Perhaps a more practical definition of freedom would be a desire to live free from the fear of death. I submit that no one can contemplate his own death without some amount of fear, but some degree of freedom from this fear certainly expands the limits of one's actions during his lifetime.

Moving from a consideration of the individual's expression of freedom, Dostoyevsky deals with freedom in the construction of society. He violently attacks the conformity in which man finds peace and comfort in the "Anthill". "We have only to discover these laws of nature and Man will no longer be responsible for his actions and life will become exceedingly easy for him. . . but then there will be someone who says "hadn't we better truck over all that rationalism in one blow, scatter it to the winds, send the logarithms to the devil and let us live once

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Fyodor Dostoyevsky, The Possessed (New York, 1948), p. 102-3.

more according to our own foolish wills?"<sup>16</sup> "What is Man without desire,<sup>17</sup>  
without free will, and without choice, if not a stop in an organ?"

One wonders which character represents Dostoyevsky's final word on freedom, the narrator of his Notes from the Underground, or Aloysha Karamazov, who finds a sort of peace in the total and unquestioning submission to the will of God.

Camus defines Man's freedom with reference to his judgment of the universe, the "Absurd". There is nothing eternal to which man can give his allegiance. "In this world rid of moral idols, Man is now alone and without a master. . . It is the beginning of the time of exile, the endless search for justification, the aimless nostalgia of the heart for a home."<sup>18</sup> "Can Man have a master and be free? The Absurd cancels all my chances for eternal freedom but restores and magnifies my freedom of action (on this earth)."<sup>19</sup>

Caligula demonstrates Ivan's formula of "everything is permitted" by his exercise of total freedom in ruling his kingdom. It is to be noted that his "total freedom" results in a form of suicide. He drives his subjects to murder him. Camus rejects the claim for unlimited freedom. " 'Everything is permitted', exclaims Ivan. That too smacks of the Absurd. . . I don't know whether or not it has been sufficiently pointed out that it is not an outburst of relief or joy, but rather a bitter acknowledgment of a fact. . . The Absurd does not liberate; it binds.

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<sup>16</sup> Dostoyevsky, Notes from the Underground, p. 22.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>18</sup> Camus, The Rebel, p. 70.

<sup>19</sup> Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 6.



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'Everything is permitted' does not mean that nothing is forbidden."

Camus realizes that this type of total freedom would result in anarchy if everyone on earth were allowed to practice it. Freedom must be limited to allow every man an equal amount. It is this goal to which Camus committed himself.

The statements of Jean-Baptiste Clamence in The Fall recall those of the Grand Inquisitor in The Brothers Karamazov. "They are free, and since they don't want freedom or its judgments, they ask to be rapped on the knuckles, invent rules, etc. The essential is that everything should be simple: good and evil arbitrarily pointed out. . . It's a chore, a long-distance race quite solitary and very exhausting. At the end of it all, freedom is too heavy to bear. . . For anyone who is alone, without God and without a master, the weight of days is dreadful. Hence, one must choose a master, God being out of style." <sup>21</sup>

Dostoyevsky and Camus seem to agree that the desire for freedom is an important part of Man's inheritance from other men, and both agree that the weight of the responsibility that accompanies freedom is almost impossible to bear.

Camus tells of a few who are strong enough to accept the "burden" of freedom, such as the revolutionaries in Les Justes. They have taken it upon themselves to fight for the freedom of all men but because they kill in doing so, they have to pay for this freedom with their lives. "'Rebellion' puts total freedom up for trial. It attacks the unlimited power that authorizes a superior to violate the forbidden frontier. The

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Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 6.

21

Camus, The Fall, pp. 133-135.

Rebel wants it to be recognized that freedom has its limits. . . the limit being precisely the human being's power to rebel. The freedom the Rebel claims, he claims for all; the freedom he refuses, he forbids anyone to enjoy."

Like Dostoyevsky, Camus violently rejects any attempt to construct a better world based on rationally determined "absolutes" to which all people must conform. He rejects any such attempt, be it religiously oriented or communistic in origin. He rejects any sacrifice of freedom in the present in which one lives for some future "perfection" be it the time of the "Second Coming" or the dissolving of the state and the establishment of the rule of the proletariat. In his attack on conformity, Camus uses an image similar to the "organ stop" used by Dostoyevsky: "Men are still men and not piano keys. . . and if he were only a piano key, man would purposely do something perverse out of sheer ingratitude, simply to have his own way."

Although the "Absurd" abolishes traditional values, total freedom for one presupposes limited freedom for someone else. In spite of all, one innately feels the necessity for a moral code by which to live. The revolutionaries in Les Justes had created their own moral code, as had Tarrou in The Plague, who tried to be a "saint without God". . . Camus' characters, unlike Aloysha Karamazov, never submit to anything beyond themselves, but neither do they find "peace".

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Camus, The Rebel, p. 284.

23

Albert Camus, Notebooks, vol. 1 (New York, 1963-65), p. 27.

Both writers conclude that freedom has its limits. Next we shall see how each writer treats the consequences of overstepping the limits of freedom: guilt and/or responsibility.

Dostoyevsky deals with the problem of Man's guilt as a result of transgressing God's law. His analysis of guilt encompasses both extremes, from "universal innocence" to "universal guilt".

Ivan Karamazov insists that "none are guilty", that no suffering could ever be justified by guilt, and that no one is responsible for anyone. However, Ivan is driven mad by the guilt he feels for his tacit allowance of the murder of his father.

Raskolnikov actually prays for strength to resist his compulsion to murder, but he is unable to resist. If God's Will rules the world and man is predestined, then how can man be expected to feel responsible for his actions? It must be noted that Raskolnikov's refusal of responsibility for his crime is only momentary. He tries an "experiment" to find out if he is among the "elite" who are able to go beyond the limits of law and escape both guilt and punishment. Not until years later in prison in Siberia does Raskolnikov admit his guilt as a consequence of sin toward God. . . before then he believed his guilt was a result of not being among the "elite".

The psychology of guilt is fascinating in Crime and Punishment. Raskolnikov feels a strange sort of "rapture" as he builds more and more evidence against himself. There is a strange bond between Sonia and Raskolnikov. He confesses his crime to Sonia who symbolizes the suffering of the innocent, and eventually finds salvation through her love, the representation of God's love on earth. We see his torment in the following

quote: "Did I murder the old woman? I murdered myself, not her! I crushed myself once for all, forever. . . But it was the devil that killed that old woman, not I. . . What am I to do?"<sup>24</sup> Sonia answers with the Orthodox formula: "Suffer, expiate your sin, and God will send you life again."<sup>24</sup>

Nikolay Stavrogin lives in the limbo of indifference. He indulges in the worst possible debaucheries in an attempt to make himself "feel" something. He tells Darya that if he could believe in something he could kill himself, but he cannot. On the other hand, both Shatov and Kirilov realize that Stavrogin is seeking a "great suffering"; he must have felt some type of guilt. It is finally this guilt that enables him to judge and condemn himself, and he commits suicide. Nikolay writes a letter to Darya expressing his feeling of responsibility for his wife's death and that of Liza: "I am afraid of suicide for I am afraid of greatness of soul. . .<sup>25</sup> Indignation and shame I can never feel, therefore not despair." We know however that Stavrogin evidently did believe in something, his own guilt. He hanged himself and the point was made that he was not insane.

At the other end of the spectrum, Aloysha believes that "all are guilty" and therefore "all are responsible for all". He accepts as valid the doctrine of original sin. Shatov agrees: "We are all to

<sup>24</sup>

Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, p. 396.

<sup>25</sup>

Dostoyevsky, The Possessed, p. 613.



blame, and if only we were all convinced of it." For Sonia, the  
 justification of suffering is the fact that "none are righteous."<sup>27</sup>  
 The narrator in Dostoyevsky's Notes from the Underground, speaks of  
 the "hyperconsciousness of one's own degradation", yet, unlike most  
 of Dostoyevsky's characters, he never seeks peace. . . he enjoys his  
 guilt.

As for Camus, he first of all denies the existence of any God  
 toward whom one could feel guilty. Man does feel guilt, but Camus  
 prefers to term this feeling "responsibility" rather than "guilt".

In The Stranger, Mersault never feels guilt or responsibility  
 for his crime. . . of course it is debatable whether or not Mersault  
 is a "human" character. He pushes "Everything is permitted" to the  
 extreme, murder. He uses Ivan's formula but is unlike him in that  
 he is completely devoid of any emotional attachment in life. Germaine  
 Brée in her biography of Camus has compared Mersault to Dostoyevsky's  
 Dmitri Karamazov: both are condemned because they don't "play the  
 game": Mersault because he felt no sorrow at his mother's funeral;  
 Dmitri because of circumstantial evidence and his strange concept of  
 honor.

Jean-Baptiste Clamence in The Fall has a much more human concept<sup>28</sup>  
 of guilt than Mersault when he talks about "being judged without a law".  
 "One could not die without having confessed all one's lies, not to God  
 or any one of His representatives. . . No, it was a matter of confessing

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<sup>26</sup>

Ibid., p. 530.

<sup>27</sup>

Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, p. 303.

<sup>28</sup>

Camus, The Fall, p. 117.

to men: a friend, a woman; otherwise, were one lie hidden, death made it definitive. That absolute murder of truth made me dizzy." In<sup>29</sup> spite of himself, Clamence is haunted by the memory of the woman who committed suicide from the bridge as he watched and did not attempt to save her. "I have never been really able to believe that human affairs were serious matters. Living among men without sharing their interests, I could not manage to believe in the commitments I had made. . . . Wasn't that the reason I could not forgive myself, that made me revolt most violently<sup>30</sup> against the judgment I felt forming in me and around me?" We cannot assert the innocence of anyone, whereas we can state with certainty the guilt of all. Every man testifies to the crime of others. . . . that is my faith and my hope."<sup>31</sup> Clamence goes from a recognition of his guilt to a form of despair that never seeks relief: "O young woman, throw yourself into the water again so that I may a second time have a chance of saving us both. . . . Just suppose we should be taken literally/We'd have to go through with it! The water's so cold! But let's not worry. It's too late now. It will always be too late. Fortunately!"<sup>32</sup> How many times do all men fail to help their fellow men and are secretly glad that they won't have a second chance!

In The Misunderstanding the mother kills herself because she can finally feel guilt for the murder she has committed. She is finally able to believe in something, the love she had for her son. We note that her

29

Ibid., p. 89.

30

Ibid., p. 86-87.

31

Camus, The Fall, p. 109.

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Ibid., p. 147.

daughter kills herself too, but emphatically denies that it is for reasons of guilt. Tarrou would probably reason that since every-

The question of guilt is a major theme in The Plague. In Father Paneloux's first sermon he insists that the plague is a punishment of God and exhorts the people to beg forgiveness. Tarrou asks Dr. Rieux's opinion of the sermon: "Do you think that the plague has its good side, that it opens men's eyes and forces them to take thought?" Dr. Rieux replies: "So does every ill that flesh is heir to. What's true of all the evils in the world is true of the plague as well. It helps men to rise above themselves. All the same, when you see the misery. . . you'd need to be a madman, or a coward, or stone blind to give in tamely to the plague."<sup>33</sup> In this passage Dr. Rieux and Tarrou reject the idea of guilt and suffering as manifestations of divine punishment, but later Tarrou seems to agree with Aloysha Karamazov that "all are guilty": "We cannot stir a finger in this world without the certainty of bringing someone to death. I have realized that we all have the plague and I have lost my peace. I only know that one must do what one can to cease being plague stricken, and that's the only way we can hope for some peace or, failing that, a decent death. . . This can bring relief to men, and if not save them, at least do them the least possible harm and even sometimes a little good. . . Each of us has the plague within him; no one on earth is free."<sup>34</sup>

Tarrou's concept of universal guilt seems contradictory to Camus' feeling toward capital punishment: "How impossible it is to say that

<sup>33</sup> Camus, The Plague (New York, 1958), p. 29.

<sup>34</sup> Camus, The Plague, p. 115.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 228.

anyone is absolutely guilty and hence impossible to decree total punishment."<sup>35</sup> However, Tarrou would probably reason that since everyone is in some measure guilty, no one has the right to set himself up as final judge over another person, to exercise the power of life and death over a fellow human being.

Caligula chose to reshape the world, to justify death with logic: "A man dies because he is guilty. A man is guilty because he is one of Caligula's subjects. Now all men are Caligula's subjects. Ergo, all men are guilty and shall die."<sup>36</sup>

In Les Justes, Camus incorporates a morality that is far beyond Mersault's indifference in The Stranger. Yaneck must die to compensate for the life he took. "The rebel has only one way of reconciling himself with his act of murder if he allows himself to be led into performing it; to accept his own death and sacrifice."<sup>37</sup> Camus' "heroes" establish their own moral code and live by it. It must be remembered that Camus does not define this moral obligation in terms of "guilt" toward God, but rather in terms of "responsibility" toward man.

His various comments on the subject of guilt/or responsibility include the following quotes: "There may be responsible persons, but no guilty ones."<sup>38</sup> "One cannot stand aside on the pretext that one is not responsible!"<sup>39</sup> "Christ died perhaps for someone but it was not for

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<sup>35</sup>

Camus, Notebooks, vol. 11, p. 157.

<sup>36</sup>

Albert Camus, Caligula and Three Other Plays (New York, 1958), p. 29.

<sup>37</sup>

Camus, The Rebel, p. 282.

<sup>38</sup>

Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 67.

<sup>39</sup>

Camus, Notebooks, vol. I, p. 143.



me. Man is guilty, but he is so for not having been able to derive  
<sup>40</sup> everything from himself." "Cain's crime exhausted our strength and  
 our love of life. We share his nature and his condemnation. At a  
 single stroke Cain emptied for us every possibility of an effective  
 life. That's the meaning of hell, but obviously it's on earth."<sup>41</sup>

Camus' final word seems to be that Man must "render account to  
<sup>42</sup> men in this world." There is a type of "metaphysical honor" in en-  
 during the world of the Absurd.

If in the discussion of the nature of guilt, Camus and Dostoyevsky  
 seem to be separated only by the difference in terms, they are at op-  
 posite poles in their attitudes toward suffering.

Dostoyevsky believes that suffering is basically good. It is  
 justified by man's guilt. In fact, many of his characters seek suffering  
 as an "object": the "self-lacerations" of Katya and Liza (The Brothers  
Karamazov), Stavrogin's seeking of a "great burden", and the self-imposed  
 torture of the narrator in Notes from the Underground. Dostoyevsky brief-  
 ly suggests that suffering is a basis for kinship, specifically in the re-  
 lationship between Raskolnikov and Sonia.

On the other hand, Ivan rejects what Ralph E. Matlaw has called the  
<sup>43</sup> "mainstay of Dostoyevsky's philosophy." (Suffering is good.) Ivan states  
 that no suffering of the innocent is ever justified. Here again it is dif-  
 ficult to know which character represents Dostoyevsky's view. . . and one

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<sup>40</sup>

Camus, Notebooks, vol. II, p. 85.

<sup>41</sup>

Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>42</sup>

Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>43</sup>

Dostoyevsky, Notes from the Underground, p. XV.

can understand what a tortured mind his must have been when one realizes that every character represents a part of him.

What seems to be Dostoyevsky's final word on suffering is that man is redeemed from his sin by the suffering he has to endure. The prime example of this theory is the novel Crime and Punishment. Sonia exhorts Raskolnikov to suffer and expiate his sin by it. She believes that God will forgive her her sin (she was forced to become a prostitute to help support her family) because of all the great suffering she has had to endure. The same belief leads her step-mother Katerina Ivanova to refuse the priest at her death: "God will forgive me because of my great suffering, and if He won't, I don't care!"<sup>44</sup>

Dmitri Karamazov goes almost joyously to prison in Siberia for a crime he did not commit, to suffer, "to sing a hymn", and to become a new man.

In the same manner, Stavrogin seeks a great suffering. In Camus' play adapted from Dostoyevsky's novel The Possessed, Stavrogin talks with Father Tihon and insists that he does not want anyone to forgive him; he wants to win his own forgiveness.

Camus believes that suffering is basically evil and never justified, although it is a permanent part of man's condition. Dr. Rieux in The Plague echoes Ivan Karamazov's refusal of suffering when he rejects the thesis of Paneloux's first sermon. It is to be noted however that a curious contradiction arises when, in his writing during World War II, Camus spoke of France having "justified" herself for the defeat of 1940 by her suffering during the Occupation.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>

Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, p. 409.

<sup>45</sup>

Albert Camus, Resistance, Rebellion, and Death (New York, 1961), p. 8-9.

It is interesting to note that like Dostoyevsky, Camus has characters who seek suffering (Jean-Baptiste Clamence and the "Renegade"), but Camus exposes the hypocrisy of their motives: to be noticed by men.

Camus develops the idea of the "community of sufferers" to a much greater extent than does Dostoyevsky. Indeed this is one basis for the feeling of "solidarity" that man feels with other men. "We must dirty ourselves with the meanness of Human suffering. The dirty, repulsive, and slimy universe of pain."<sup>46</sup> Suffering unites men, but even more, rebellion against suffering unites men as seen in the characters of Dr. Rieux, Tarrou, and Rambert in The Plague, the revolutionaries in Les Justes, and the entire resistance movement during World War II. "A loveless world is a dead world and always there comes an hour when one is weary of prisons, of one's work and of devotion to duty, and all one craves for is a loved face and the warmth and wonder of a loving heart" . . . (Grand cries in front of a shop window remembering his love for Jeanne). Dr. Rieux sees him: "At this moment he suffered with Grand's sorrow and what filled his breast was the passionate indignation we feel when confronted by the anguish all men share."<sup>47</sup> There comes a time when even the mighty Dr. Rieux has to fortify himself with indifference in order to endure the senseless suffering that he is helpless to alleviate.

Camus talks about Christ's suffering in The Rebel: "He chose a slave's punishment to reduce the enormous distance separating humiliated humanity and the Master."<sup>48</sup> Camus contends that in order to be relevant to twentieth

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<sup>46</sup>

Camus, Notebooks, vol. I, p. 196.

<sup>47</sup>

Camus, The Plague, p. 237.

<sup>48</sup>

Camus, The Rebel, p. 110.

century man, the New Testament should have ended with Christ on the Cross, suffering though innocent, and forever foresaken by God.

Death is the inevitable fate of all men. The final physical result is the same although the emotional attitudes toward it differ.

Dostoyevsky's characters approach death in many different ways: Stephan Verhenovsky quietly stops living, Father Zossima dies accepting death as God's will, and others like Fyodor Karamazov, the old pawnbroker and her sister, Shatov, Liza, and Mariky, have life violently wretched from them, and some like Stavrogin and Kirilov bring about their own deaths. Dostoyevsky's "ideal" death has the victim dying willingly, comforted by the anticipation of a greater happiness.

Camus never has a character to accept without protest the physical anguish of death. One's life must be a "living protest against death." For Dostoyevsky, the physical agony is in part alleviated by emotional peace. . . . but never for Camus. For Camus the physical agony of death must be borne with the knowledge that physical death is the end.

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The Brothers Karamazov (New York, 1950), p. 125.



### III THE DEFIANCE OF THE ABSURD

Both Dostoyevsky and Camus find the world lacking justice and happiness and man foresaken. Each refuses to be content with the logical consequence of a serious confrontation with a meaningless universe, suicide. Each defines the "Absurd", and each defies it and goes on to find reasons for existing in this meaningless world. First we shall see how each writer revolts against what he finds the world to be, and then study the belief system that each has constructed.

In the words of Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor, "Man was created a rebel, and how can a rebel be happy?"<sup>49</sup> None of Dostoyevsky's characters ever find happiness until they cease to rebel.

Raskolnikov revolts against the traditional limits of morality which make him ordinary. He tries to go beyond these limits but is not able to do so.

Kirilov revolts with sorrow. He wants for there to be a God and sees the need for one, but he finds that there is no God. He rebels and creates his own god, the "Man-God" (his own will), and with it complete happiness.

The entire novel The Possessed seems to be a testimony to the fact that men torture themselves and others, that they are unhappy, and that God is equally indifferent to those who believe in Him, such as Shatov, and those who can't, such as Stavrogin. It is well to note Camus' comments on this novel: "Dostoyevsky's characters are neither odd nor absurd. They are like us; we have the same heart. His book prefigures our nihilism. Its protagonists are torn or dead souls unable to love and suffering from

<sup>49</sup>

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamazov (New York, 1950), p. 125.

their inability, wanting to believe and yet unable to do so. The subject of the book is the murder of Shatov and the spiritual adventure and death of Stavrogin, a contemporary hero.<sup>50</sup>

In Dostoyevsky's Notes from the Underground, revolt is described as an integral part of human nature. "You are bound to accept her (Nature) as she is and consequently all her conclusions. But what do I care about the laws of Nature and arithmetic when for some reason I dislike those laws and the fact that 'twice two makes four'? Of course I cannot break through a wall by battering my head against it, if I really do not have the strength to break through it against, but I am not going to resign myself to it simply because it's a stone wall and I am not strong enough."<sup>51</sup>

Perhaps the greatest example of revolt in all of Dostoyevsky's writings is Ivan Karamazov's refusal of salvation. He refuses salvation because to have it he would have to accept the world as God made it, and he will not. For Ivan, salvation must be either for all or for no one. There is a "tragic grandeur" in Ivan's revolt.

Camus never ceases to revolt. His is a constant refusal of "it has to be". "Revolt is a claim, motivated by the concept of a complete unity, against the suffering of life and death and a protest against the human condition, both for its incompleteness, thanks to death, and its wastefulness, thanks to evil. . . The Rebel defies more than he denies."<sup>53</sup> Camus, as has been stated, defines the human condition as a "universal death

<sup>50</sup> Albert Camus, The Possessed (New York, 1960), Preface.

<sup>51</sup> Dostoyevsky, Notes from the Underground, p. 12.

<sup>52</sup> Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 54.

<sup>53</sup> Camus, The Rebel, p. 24-25.

sentence". He finds his purpose for living in a continuous, if vain, fight against this sentence. "Man is mortal. That may be, but let us die resisting; and if our lot is complete annihilation, let us not behave in such a way that it seems just!" (Obermann Letter 90).<sup>54</sup>

It is interesting to note Camus' comments on Ivan's rebellion. Ivan puts God "on trial": "If evil is essential to Divine Creation, then creation is unacceptable. Ivan refutes God in the name of a moral value, i. e. Justice."<sup>55</sup>

Dr. Rieux in The Plague also puts God on trial as he watches the death agony of the Orthon Child with Father Paneloux.<sup>56</sup>

In the small face slowly there rose a long, incessant scream. . . filling the world with a fierce, indignant protest. . .

Rieux: That child was innocent and you know it as well as I do!

Paneloux: But perhaps we should love what we cannot understand.

Rieux: No, Father, I have a very different idea of love and until my dying day I shall refuse to love a scheme of things in which children are put to torture."

In addition to rebelling against the Absurd, Camus rebels against an outgrowth of the Absurd, the philosophy of nihilism. He refuses to accept the blank wall of "nothingness". "The rebel is seeking, without knowing it, a moral philosophy or a religion. There, if the rebel blasphemes, it is in the hope of finding a new god."<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup>

Camus, Resistance, Rebellion, and Death, fourth letter.

<sup>55</sup>

Camus, The Rebel, p. 55-56.

<sup>56</sup>

Camus, The Plague, p. 194.

<sup>57</sup>

Camus, The Rebel, p. 101.

Camus refuses "peace" because the acceptance of peace would mean that Man accepts things as they are, and that would mean the acceptance of the misery and injustice which characterizes the human condition.

Like Martha in The Misunderstanding, Camus' heroes must leave this world "unreconciled".<sup>58</sup> "In face of the world of the Absurd, the longing for rest and peace must itself be cast aside; it coincides with the acceptance of iniquity. Those who weep for the happy periods they encounter in history acknowledge what they want: not the alleviation but the silencing of misery. But let us, on the contrary, sing the praises of the times when misery cries aloud and disturbs the peace of the surfeited rich!"<sup>59</sup>

Thus, the rebel confronts the world of the Absurd with an impossible demand for "order and clarity". "The rebel does not ask for life, but for reasons for living. He rejects the consequences implied by death. If nothing lasts, nothing is justified, everything that dies is deprived of meaning. To fight against death is to claim that life has meaning."<sup>60</sup>

This same rebel revolts against unlimited freedom. "He affirms the existence of a borderline over which his master may not cross."<sup>61</sup>

Indeed, "revolt" is the core of what Camus defines "existence" to be. "When the throne of God is overturned, the rebel realizes that it is now his own responsibility to create the justice, order, and unity that he sought in vain within his own condition. . . and in this way to justify the

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<sup>58</sup>

Camus, Caligula and Three Other Plays, p. 125.

<sup>59</sup>

Camus, The Rebel, p. 248.

<sup>60</sup>

Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>61</sup>

Ibid., p. 13.



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fall of God in the effort to create the dominion of Man." Rather than finding his "redemption" in "suffering" like Dostoyevsky, Camus finds his "justification" in "revolt". "Is it possible eventually to reject injustice without ceasing to acclaim the nature of man and the beauty of the world? Our answer is 'yes'. In upholding beauty, we prepare the way for the day of regeneration. Civilization will give first place to this living virtue on which is founded the common dignity of Man and the world he lives in, and which we must now define in the face of a world that insults us."

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In connection with the "Defiance of the Absurd", it is appropriate to talk about the attitudes toward suicide taken by each writer.

Although suicide is forbidden in Orthodox doctrine, one gets the impression that Dostoyevsky approves of it in some circumstances such as when it is inflicted from a desire for self-punishment, if it is equivalent to the highest form of suffering. (Stavrogin). Dmitri Karamazov plans to commit suicide after one last night of revelling with Grushenka . . . This could be a form of self-punishment but it could also be a demonstration of his will over the power that "sensuality" had had in his life. Kirilov's motives for suicide are very anti-religious. For Kirilov, suicide is the highest form of rebellion, not the greatest form of self-punishment. He proclaims the triumph of his will over God's. It is his proclamation of complete freedom. Raskolnikov finds that he is unable to commit suicide,

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Ibid., p. 25.

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Ibid., Preface.

and in this incident at the bridge Dostoyevsky sees the hope of future redemption and a return to life. Ivan returns as an example of one who is tormented by the inability to live with his guilt and the inability to believe in or accept the possibility of redemption. He plans to "smash the cup to the ground" when he becomes thirty.

As for Camus, he treats suicide as a consequence of a nihilistic philosophy. If this life has no meaning, why bother to endure it while waiting for death. Caligula revolts: "The world's all wrong." <sup>64</sup> He establishes his own order, finds no peace in that, and finally brings about his own death. The Misunderstanding offers a study in two different forms of suicide. The mother kills herself because of guilt, but Martha kills herself as a final act of rebellion. She refuses to be reconciled to the order of things. She refuses to endure. Clamence in The Fall contemplates suicide to "punish" his associates, but he reconsiders when he realizes that no one would care one way or the other.

Thus, Camus' final word is a rejection of the legitimacy of suicide. Suicide is for him, a type of "peace" that one must not allow oneself. There is a "metaphysical honor". . . not only in "enduring", but also in "rebellling". . . Suicide admits that life is too much to bear and that it's not worth the effort of living. According to Camus, on the contrary, life constitutes the "only value". "The final conclusion of absurdist reasoning is the repudiation of suicide and the acceptance of the desperate encounter between human inquiry and the silence of the universe. . . Human life is the only necessary good since it is precisely that life that makes this encounter possible, and since, without life, the absurdist wager would have no basis." <sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>

Camus, Caligula and Three Other Plays, p. 14.

<sup>65</sup>

Camus, The Rebel, p. 5.

When one refuses to affirm a belief in nothingness one automatically affirms a belief in "something". The following paragraphs attempt to outline the basic beliefs of Dostoyevsky and Camus concerning life, death, and salvation, i. e. the belief structure by which they justify existence.

First we shall look at Dostoyevsky's attitude toward life as illustrated by several of his characters.

Ivan asserts that life has no meaning and he refuses an eternal life which would compensate for the meaninglessness of this life. In spite of this, there is something within Ivan that makes him love the "sticky green leaves" as much as his brother Aloysha. Ivan judges life rationally, finds it wanting, and yet, emotionally he wants to believe that it has meaning.

The narrator in Dostoyevsky's Notes from the Underground does not condemn life because of its pain, for this pain constitutes his enjoyment of life. "But it is just in that cold, abominable half-despair, half-belief. . . in that hyperconsciousness and to some extent doubtful hopelessness of one's position, in that hell of unsatisfied desires turned inward, in that fever of oscillations, of resolutions taken forever and regretted again, that the savor of that strange enjoyment lies." <sup>66</sup> The narrator talks about life as the "incessant process of attaining", <sup>67</sup> and one is reminded of Camus' definition of life as unceasing revolt.

Stavrogin cannot accept the perpetual ambiguity of the meaning of life. He wants a total faith or a total unbelief but he is incapable of

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<sup>66</sup>

Dostoyevsky, Notes from the Underground, p. 11.

<sup>67</sup>

Ibid., p. 30.

having either. "Life is meaningless". . . but until the end he cannot believe that completely enough to commit suicide.

Kirilov is a mass of contradictions. He loves life and insists that "eternity is here on earth".<sup>68</sup> He rejoices at Shatov's new-found happiness and then calmly blows his brains out to demonstrate his freedom and proclaim his divinity.

Shatov, like Raskolnikov, ultimately finds his meaning and purpose for living in the reciprocal love for another human being. Raskolnikov and Sonia will have time to enjoy their "new life". . . but what of poor, deliriously happy, God-praising Shatov, to whom fate allowed only one day of happiness!

Although Camus insists that Ivan is more Dostoyevsky's "porte-parole" than Aloysha, Dostoyevsky seems to want to leave Aloysha as his final testimony of what meaning he finds in existence. Aloysha "embraces" the earth as God's creation and embraces all men as brothers having the same Father. He realizes that the meaning of existence is beyond his comprehension, but that belief in God is the only way to endure. His final reaction to the problem is total submission to the will of God. Thus, for both Aloysha and Dostoyevsky, existence must be defined as "both illusory and eternal".<sup>69</sup>

Camus' entire body of writing might be taken as a "hymn to the battlefield of life". We are not guaranteed any day beyond the present; therefore, we must commit ourselves to live for the day, in constant revolt against the misery and injustice we find. For Camus, "life" is synonymous with "engagement", with rebellion. "Man's greatness lies in his decision

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<sup>68</sup>

Dostoyevsky, The Possessed, p. 74.

<sup>69</sup>

Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 112.



to be stronger than his condition."<sup>70</sup> "It is essential to condemn what must be condemned. . . On the other hand, one must praise at length what still deserves to be praised. . . Even the work that negates still affirms something and does homage to the wretched and magnificent life that is ours."<sup>71</sup>

For Camus, Man is the meaning of life: what it is that constitutes his "solidarity" with other men, and the shared human condition which includes not only a "community of suffering" but also a sharing of joy. "The artist has to speak of what all know and what is common to us all. The sea, rain, necessity, desire, the struggle against death; these are things that unite us all. We resemble one another in what we see together, in what we suffer together."<sup>72</sup> "Life with its face of tears and sun; life in the salt sea and on the warm stones. Life as I love and understand it. As I caress it I feel my love and despair gathering strength within me. Today is both 'yes' and 'no'. . . 'no' and rebellion against everything which is not tears and sunlight."<sup>73</sup>

Camus' sensuous love of Nature does not allow him to forget the human element in life. In his Notebook, he speaks of "this world where the flowers and wind will never make us forgive all the rest."<sup>74</sup> In another work: "The battle we are waging (The Resistance) is sure of victory because it is as obstinate as Spring. . . for all those landscapes, those flowers, and those plowed fields show you every Spring that there are

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<sup>70</sup>

Camus, Resistance, Rebellion, and Death, p. 39.

<sup>71</sup>

Ibid., p. 239.

<sup>72</sup>

Ibid., p. 258.

<sup>73</sup>

Camus, Notebooks, vol. I, p. 59.

<sup>74</sup>

Ibid., p. 184.

things you cannot choke in blood."<sup>75</sup> Does this not express an unacknowledged belief in some sort of permanence and therefore express some sort of hope?

Camus talks about "moments" in life when one experiences a momentary "peace". The prime example is the midnight swim of Dr. Rieux and Tarrou in The Plague: . . . "Free from the world, the town, the plague, they started back. They were conscious of being perfectly at one and the memory of this night would be cherished by them both. . . The disease had given them a respite, but now they must set their shoulders to the wheel again."<sup>76</sup> This momentary awareness of brotherhood is what saves man from the terrible sense of exile that comes from a confrontation with his universe.

These "moments of grace" enable some to endure. Caligula uses "scorn" and "indifference" as the means employed by Clamence and Mersault. Camus' final statement concerning life is that it is "commitment", not to the will of God, but rather to "the grave and suffering earth".<sup>77</sup> One must "sacrifice no happiness to a future Eden. One must be concerned with the damned."<sup>78</sup> One must fulfill one's mission on this earth which is to be a man, to play one's part, to do one's job."<sup>79</sup> "Tomorrow the world may burst into fragments. The only certainty left to us is naked suffering, common to all, intermingling its roots with those of a stubborn hope."<sup>80</sup>

<sup>75</sup>

Camus, Resistance, Rebellion, and Death, p. 25.

<sup>76</sup>

Camus, The Plague, p. 232.

<sup>77</sup>

Camus, Notebooks, vol. II., p. 248.

<sup>78</sup>

Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>79</sup>

Camus, Notebooks, vol. I., p. 73.

<sup>80</sup>

Camus, Resistance, Rebellion, and Death, p. 239.

Against the definition of life professed by the new "missionary-heroes" of Camus' "religion of revolt", we recall Rambert's emphatically human definition of life: "The truth is, I wasn't brought into the world to write newspaper articles. But it is quite likely that I was brought into the world to live with a woman!"<sup>81</sup> Rambert soon joins the ranks of the "heroes" when he refuses happiness (escape from Oran) when all cannot have it.

Next we shall examine another part of the "belief system" constructed by each writer: the feelings about "eternal life" expressed by Dostoyevsky and Camus.

Dostoyevsky believes that there must be an eternal life free from sorrow and suffering. In a way, the existence of such an eternal life is the only way that God could redeem Himself for all the suffering He allows man to endure on earth. Eternal life is a reward given to those who "endured" and "kept the faith". We find Dostoyevsky's characters seeking suffering with the motive of making themselves more worthy of eternal life.

In addition to being a "reward" or "consolation", eternal life is a hope and a comfort. Sonia found strength to endure her wretched life because of her faith that God would see her suffering and one day have pity on her.

Aloysha emphatically affirms what Dostoyevsky wants with all his heart to believe as he says to the "Boys" at the funeral of Ilusha Snegiryov, "We shall meet again." Aloysha's image of eternal life is quite different from Svidrigailov's in Crime and Punishment: "We always imagine

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Camus, The Plague, P. 78.

eternity as something beyond our conception. . . but what if it is one little room, black, grimy, and spiders in every corner?" Raskolnikov replies in anguish: "Can it be that you can imagine nothing juster and more comforting than that?" Svidrigailov: "And how can we tell, perhaps that is just!"<sup>82</sup>

Camus refuses the hope of an eternal life for it makes us less committed to making the life we live count. The "Kingdom" is of this earth, in the solidarity that man finds with other men, in the rare moments of "grace". "There always comes a moment when people give up struggling and tearing each other apart, willing at last to like each other for what they are. It's the kingdom of heaven."<sup>83</sup>

Father Paneloux in The Plague advocates the "all-or-nothing" belief of which Aloysha Karamazov would approve:<sup>84</sup>

- Dr. Rieux: "God puts us with our backs to the walls. Who would dare to assert that eternal happiness can compensate for a single moment's suffering?"
- Paneloux: "My brother, we must believe everything or deny everything. And who would dare to deny everything? . . . The suffering of children were our bread of affliction, but without this bread our souls would die of spiritual hunger. . . We must make God's will ours, in total self-surrender."

<sup>82</sup> Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, p. 275.

<sup>83</sup> Camus, Notebooks, vol. II., p. 253.

<sup>84</sup> Camus, The Plague, p. 201-203.



Dr. Rieux discusses the same problem with Tarrou:

Rieux: "I've never managed to get used to seeing people die. . . but after all, since the order of the world is shaped by death, mightn't it be better for God if we refuse to believe in Him and struggle with all our might against death, without raising our eyes toward heaven where He sits in silence?"

Tarrou: "But your victories will never be lasting."

Rieux: "I know, but it's no reason for giving up the struggle."

Next we see Dr. Rieux's reaction to the death of Tarrou, the man who had searched for peace in trying to be a "saint without God." "Rieux felt 'peace', the silence of defeat, final . . . The doctor could not tell if Tarrou had found peace now that it was all over, but for himself, he had a feeling that no peace was possible to him henceforth, anymore than an armistice for a mother bereaved of her son, or a man who buries his friend." <sup>86</sup> Dr. Rieux can take no comfort in the hope of an eternal life for Tarrou, a man who would have deserved such a reward if any did.

In summary, Camus states: "I learn that there is no superhuman happiness, no eternity outside the sweep of days. I know that this sky will last longer than I, and what shall I call eternity except what will continue after my death." <sup>87</sup> "The secret of my universe: imagining God without human immortality." <sup>88</sup>

The attitudes toward the concept of eternal life are closely allied to the concept of "salvation", and it is with a view of how Dostoyevsky and Camus treat this concept that we complete the outline of the belief system of both writers.

<sup>85</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>87</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>89</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 152.

<sup>91</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Camus, Notebooks, vol. II, p. 12.

Dostoyevsky's concept of salvation is integrally linked with his belief in eternal life. Eternal life is the evidence that God has saved us from our just condemnation. Salvation is the promise of a final attainment of peace. It is won by suffering. Some of Dostoyevsky's characters suffer enough to gain a type of happiness or "peace" on this earth. Dmitri, though paying for a crime he did not commit, anticipates with joy the "new life" he will have with Grushenka. He is somehow "purified" by this suffering and by his love for Grushenka.

Raskolnikov too experiences a regeneration ("salvation on earth") because of Sonia's love for him which symbolizes the love of God. His suffering does not bring him redemption until he wants it.

Dostoyevsky's probe for belief runs to both extremes: Ivan who refuses salvation because all can't have it; Stavrogin who can't believe in it although he wants to; and Aloysha who accepts it as his goal, his hope, and his reward for his total submission to the will of God.

In Dostoyevsky's terms, Camus' denial of an eternity would presuppose the denial of "salvation", but such is not the case. Camus defines salvation within the context of his own particular system of belief.

"All the unhappiness of human beings springs from the hope that tempts them from the silence of the citadel and exposes them on the ramparts in expectation of salvation."<sup>89</sup> "The only truth is the world. Man must be faithful to it, Man must live in it, and find his salvation in it."<sup>90</sup>

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Camus, The Rebel, p. 29.

<sup>90</sup>

Camus, The Fall, p. 90.

Jean-Baptiste Clamence gives his definition of salvation in The Fall: "The body's death was in itself sufficient punishment that absolved all. Salvation (that is, the right to disappear definitively) was won in the sweat of the death agony."<sup>91</sup> It is certain that Dr. Rieux would agree with him.

Camus created a "strong" character in the person of Father Paneloux. Paneloux starts off having all the answers. . . and ends by choosing God in spite of his doubt.<sup>92</sup>

Rieux: "We are working side by side for something that unites us. . . beyond blasphemy and prayers."

Paneloux: "Yes, you too are working for Man's salvation."

Rieux's type of salvation is advocated by Camus in Resistance, Rebellion, and Death: "You (Nazis) chose injustice and sided with the gods. I chose justice in order to remain faithful to the world. I continue to believe that this world has no ultimate meaning. But I know that something in it has a meaning and that is Man, because he is the only creature to insist on having one. This world has at least the truth of Man and our task is to provide its justification against fate itself. And it has no justification but Man. . . hence he must be saved if we want to save the idea we have of life. You will ask, 'what do you mean by saving Man?', and with all my being I shout to you that I mean not mutilating him and yet giving a chance to the justice that man alone can conceive!"<sup>93</sup>

<sup>91</sup>

Camus, The Fall, p. 90.

<sup>92</sup>

Camus, The Plague, p. 197.

<sup>93</sup>

Camus, Resistance, Rebellion, and Death.

## IV THE CONTINUED SEARCH FOR JUSTIFICATION

One does not have to ponder too profoundly to identify his world with the one described by Dostoyevsky and by a twentieth century contemporary, Camus. With the unbelievable advances in human knowledge within the last century, one can no longer cling to traditional beliefs which have no relevance to the times. Dostoyevsky seems very much acquainted with our times when he asks: "Have you noticed that the sub-<sup>94</sup>lest slaughterers have almost always been the most civilized gentlemen?" Anyone who seeks to find out who and what he is, is groping for a redefinition of his relationship toward his fellow men. One characteristic of both Camus and Dostoyevsky with which we can identify is the terrible burden of individuality demonstrated by both. We can no longer fit into a common body of belief. Each man must conduct his own private search for meaning. Unfortunately, neither Dostoyevsky nor Camus offer an answer totally satisfying. Neither is it comforting to realize that one can never expect to be satisfied. Both Dostoyevsky and Camus describe our world; condemn it; and go on to say "this is how it is, but . . .", and so must we.

Man will never comprehend the world, and whatever judgments he should make as to its order or lack of it, its creator or lack of one, will be ultimately subjective. Dostoyevsky states that one can never know God's reasons, that the only thing to do is to stop trying to find out "why" and simply submit. Camus can't "get off the ground" to deal with God. . . he

<sup>94</sup>

Dostoyevsky, Notes from the Underground, p. 21.



has to deal with what he can say "yes" and "no" to, Man. . . real and in the flesh.

It is the universality of human nature that enables us to identify with many of the characters created by both writers. As was demonstrated, Dostoyevsky and Camus cite essentially the same traits of human nature. The major difference is that Dostoyevsky believes that "original sin" is fundamental to the Nature of man. Man does evil in spite of himself; he is incapable of saving himself. This basically pessimistic concept of human nature leads Dostoyevsky eventually to faith. On the other hand, Camus advocates an optimistic view of human nature; "Man can master in himself everything that should be mastered."<sup>95</sup> I cannot believe that guilt or responsibility is inherited but neither can I identify with Camus' incredible pride and audacity when he says that all men can be like his heroes who can perfect themselves. Even as one such "hero",<sup>96</sup> Dora, of Les Justes, said, "Surely such a pride will be punished."

In attempting to judge the "human" quality of the characters, one is sometimes overwhelmed by the intensity and at times excess of emotion in Dostoyevsky's characters. Although Dostoyevsky portrayed universal human nature, one must remember that his characters are totally "Russian" in temperament. His characters are either "hot" or "cold" and sometimes both at once, but they stand before the reader as living human beings. Camus creates the complexity of characters in Dr. Rieux, Tarrou, Maria, Rambert, Dora, and a few others to make them "living", but I find it impossible to say the same for the character of Mersault in The Stranger. I cannot call his existence "living".

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Camus, The Rebel, p. 303.

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Camus, Caligula and Three Other Plays, p. 164.

Both writers push their similar definition of our world to its extreme: if there is no longer any basis for traditional values, then "all is permitted". But even animals are ruled by some sort of "code" or law of nature, and both Dostoyevsky and Camus reject and go beyond a moral code of unlimited freedom. All of Dostoyevsky's characters who tried to live by such a code end in some form of defeat or failure except Kirilov. . . . and to Kirilov's suicide we are forced to say, "O. K. . . . So what?" A similar situation happens with Camus. He replaces the formula for unlimited freedom held by Caligula by the code of limited freedom adhered to by Les Justes.

The important generalization to be made concerning the concept of freedom that Man has inherited, is that both Dostoyevsky and Camus reject unlimited freedom and cite the necessity of a moral code, but the difference comes when Dostoyevsky defines the "limits" of freedom in relationship to God's traditional law, and Camus defines the limits of freedom in relationship to the freedom of other men.

Within the discussion of "freedom", it should be noted that neither writer is willing to sacrifice individuality to a "common good" rationally conceived. For Dostoyevsky, freedom is that part of Man in the image of God. . . . It causes him anguish, but it raises him above the animals. For Camus, rebellion is based on the concept that those who have freedom must fight until everyone has it. It is a necessary component of a "whole man". "I cannot love all humanity except with a vast and somewhat abstract love. But I love a few men, living or dead, with such force and admiration that I am always eager to preserve in others what will someday perhaps make them resemble those I love. Freedom is nothing else but a chance to be

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better, whereas enslavement is a certainty of the worst." Camus' moral code based on "limits" defined in relationship to one's brother seem to be merely a secularization of the moral code advocated by Dostoyevsky as established by God. . . . uncompromised by the institutions of religion.

Dostoyevsky's concept of guilt is based on his belief in "original" sin. Since we all "suffer" (we are all "punished"), it follows logically that we are all guilty in the eyes of God. Camus terms Dostoyevsky's concept of guilt "moral communism".

It is necessary to realize that Camus' concept of "culpabilité" is not synonymous with Dostoyevsky's concept of guilt. One gets the impression that if he could, Camus would like to eliminate the feeling of guilt from the human consciousness. . . . but he can't and still have his characters represent living human beings. Therefore, rather than have his characters feel guilt as a result of transgressing God's law, Camus has his characters feel responsibility toward their "brothers" (Man's law). "God is not needed to create guilt or to punish. Our fellow men suffice aided by themselves. Worse than the Last Judgment is the Judgment of Men. . . . Don't wait for the Last Judgment; it happens every day." 98

Call it "guilt" or "responsibility", the feeling is the same, and indeed it is this awareness in Man which makes him define the limits of freedom. . . . whether he attributes these limits to God or to Man.

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Camus, Resistance, Rebellion, and Death, p. 103.

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Camus, The Fall, p. 110.

I am a "de-facto" Christian. Whether or not I shall ever again "fit" into an organized system of belief, my judgment of myself and others will always be within the context of my interpretation of the religious law which I inherited at birth. Camus is too idealistic. It takes a rare "secular saint" to start from "scratch", somehow sense his responsibility toward his fellow men, and conduct himself accordingly. I lean more toward Dostoyevsky's interpretation: Man has a selfish tendency to place himself above all others. It takes work and commitment to something beyond imperfect Man to "Love thy neighbor as thyself". Yes, we must "render account in this world", for the simple reason that that's the only real way we can render account to God.

Camus has a reply (reprinted from an article in Actuelles, p. 216): "De quel droit un chretien ou un Marxiste m'accuserait-il de pessimisme? Ce n'est pas moi qui ai inventé la misère de la créature, ni les terribles formules de la malédiction divine. Ce n'est pas moi qui ai crié ce 'Nemo Bonus', ni la damnation des enfants sans baptême. Ce n'est pas moi qui ai dit que l'homme était incapable de se sauver tout seul et que, au fond de son abaissement, il n'avait d'espérance que dans la grâce de Dieu." <sup>99</sup>

Camus would agree with Ivan's insistence that he will not accept a world in which the suffering of the innocent is a fact. Dostoyevsky insists that suffering is a means of purification, that we must deserve it even though we can't always know why. . . that suffering is a means of attaining salvation. In his search for a belief system relative to the human condition, Camus sees suffering not as a way to salvation, but as common to all men, an element that unites men with other men. "Even men



without a Gospel have their Mount of Olives and one must not fall  
 100  
 asleep on theirs either."

As to the question of suffering, Camus seems so much more compassionate than Dostoyevsky. Never could I accept a logic that would say if some misfortune or sorrow befalls someone it is because of his sin. No! evil and happiness fall on the "just" as well as the "unjust". I side with Camus in believing that one should do all one can to alleviate the sufferings of one's "neighbor". . . not pat him on the back and tell him that surely God will reward him for all he has endured! If there is such a thing as "salvation", it was never won by anything Man ever did. Salvation is very much related to the reward of an eternal life in Dostoyevsky's belief system. I do not know, nor shall I ever know if there is an eternal life,--but for me "salvation" means finding a meaning and a purpose for making the effort to live on this earth, "something" to which I commit myself.

In dealing with the physical event of death which all men must experience, one sees that the way one dies has little correlation with belief in a life after death. . . both believers and non-believers have been heroes and cowards. It would be easier to accept the death of a loved one if one could take comfort, and allow the person to take comfort, in the hope of an eternal life. Who can say what his feelings will be as he faces his own death? "Each man approaches his own death with a mixture of fear and hope."

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Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 94.

Although two of Dostoyevsky's characters represent the greatest form of rebellion, rebellion against God (Ivan and Kirilov), Dostoyevsky would have us believe that his final word is not to rebel but to submit to God and His world as it is. Dostoyevsky sacrifices his power to revolt for "peace". We know that Camus refuses "peace" (ceasing to revolt) out of his love of humanity. Here again Camus seems so much more compassionate than Dostoyevsky when one might think it would be the opposite, Dostoyevsky being the "religious" writer. Dostoyevsky's is a more intellectual or spiritual rebellion but religion is such a part of him that he cannot remain unreconciled. Camus doesn't have this religious heritage and his rebellion is not so much on the spiritual level against God as it is on the earth against men who step over the limits of other men's freedom. Faith does not torment Camus like it torments Dostoyevsky because he never had it to begin with.

If one is indeed rebelling against God when one attempts to correct parts of His creation. . . so be it! I could waste a lifetime in endless accusations against God's handiwork but it wouldn't change the situation. As Camus has said, one must act "as if" one could remake the man.

Both Dostoyevsky and Camus condemn suicide but for different reasons. Dostoyevsky condemns it because it indicates a refusal of God's order of life and death. Camus condemns it because it represents a defeat, an end to revolt.

Both Dostoyevsky and Camus find meaning in commitment to God and as a consequence an acceptance and love of life as His creation; Camus in commitment to men and as a consequence a pledge to judge and "remake" existence on earth. Although Camus insists that nothing is eternal, one

can sense in his writings a passionate love of nature which is eternal and indifferent to the agonies and follies of men.

I found myself searching for some unacknowledged belief in Camus, and evidently so have others. "Le christianisme., après tant de siècles de guerres fratricides, de persécutions, d'avidité pour la richesse et le pouvoir semblait à Camus avoir trahi". . . Jean-Louis Barrault discerner en lui deux faces: (Mars 1960 d'Hommage): celle e'un moine laïque, tout ruisselant d'un Dieu qu'il n'osait pas nommer et l'autre qui, plus secrète, révélait un amour voluptueux de la vie."<sup>101</sup>

As Camus said, "to live is to judge". The mere fact that Dostoyevsky, Camus, and we continue to endure life after we recognize its imperfections, is a testimony to the fact that it is worth living. I do not know that Dostoyevsky would go so far as to say that life is merely a "valley of sorrow" that one must pass through in order to reach Paradise, but Orthodox doctrine would certainly place a heavier value on a life after death, ("this life is a mere preparation for the next"). If anyone should be as committed to the service of one's fellow men as Camus is, it should logically be the Christian. He is justified in calling them to account for their compromises to the world. "And what I know, which sometimes creates a deep longing in me, is that if Christians made up their minds to it, millions of voices, millions I say, throughout the world, would be added to the appeal of a handful of isolated individuals who, without any sort of affiliation, today intercede almost everywhere and ceaselessly for children and men."<sup>102</sup>

<sup>101</sup>

Peyre, p. 4.

<sup>102</sup>

Camus, Resistance, Rebellion, and Death, p. 74.

If Camus cannot accept religion then it is not so much God whom he rejects but those who call themselves His representatives.

Dostoyevsky shows his love of God in worship, a personal, "detached-from-the-world" type worship. But Camus shows his love of \_\_\_\_\_ ? with a crusade-like "engagement" in the concerns of men. As he said in his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize, "Le Témoin de la Liberté: Dans le monde de la condamnation à mort qui est le nôtre, les artistes témoignent pour ce qui dans l'homme refuse de mourir."<sup>103</sup>

Dostoyevsky's analysis of the complexity of Man and his search for meaning will always be relevant to twentieth century man, but Camus' conclusions as to how one can find justification for living seem so much more relevant to us today than those of Dostoyevsky. We cannot "go back" to the Church like Dostoyevsky until the Church (or we as members of it) comes forth with a redefinition of its mission in the world. Until that time a sensitive man must try to be like Tarrou, a "saint without God", or more exactly, a "saint without a church". One can no longer hope for an assurance of anything. Our times call for a redefinition of all things including "morality", "love", "compassion", "duty", and "faith".

As an adult, I have no choice but to continue this search for meaning alone, for it is an individual longing. I realize with sorrow that never shall I have again the faith of a child but, at the same time, I know that I will never be completely devoid of faith. In shaping plans for a future I testify to a belief that somehow that future will be meaningful.

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Peyre, "Albert Camus, Moraliste," p. 21.



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